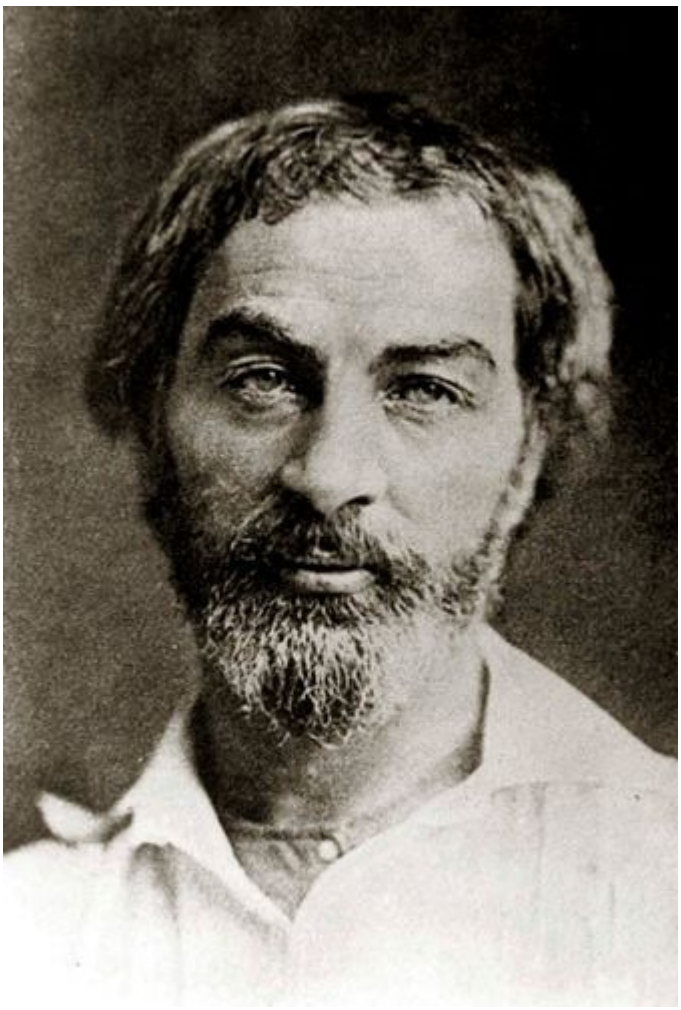
Westward Expansion, The West: An American Symbol

by ReadWorks



American poet Walt Whitman, 1854

In 1820, an Englishman wrote: "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?" The Englishman was mocking America. He echoed a European **sentiment** that Americans were crude, uneducated people. Many Europeans believed Americans did not care for art or literature.

England's criticism was not entirely true. But Americans did not have a very strong national **identity** at the turn of the 19th century. In 1837, the American poet Ralph Waldo Emerson responded to the Englishman's claim. He gave a speech called "The American Scholar." He summoned all the artists and poets in America. He called for a national literature based on the

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American experience. But what was the American experience? *Adventure. Nature. The West*. All of these things were very American.

One American poet who helped immortalize American idealism in the 19th century was Walt Whitman. To him, the **spirit** of America was closely tied to nature. Whereas European countries were tamed and crowded with farms, America was wild and free. Read these two poems about nature and the West by Walt Whitman. How does he describe the West? Does he seem excited by nature?

"To the East and To the West" by Walt Whitman

To the East and to the West,
To the man of the Seaside State and of Pennsylvania,
To the Canadian of the north, to the Southerner I love,
These with perfect trust to**depict** you as myself, the germs are in all men,
I believe the main purport of these States is to found a superb friendship, exalte, previously unknown,
Because I perceive it waits, and has been always waiting, latent in all men.

"A Promise to California" by Walt Whitman

A promise to California,
Or inland to the great pastoral Plains, and on to Puget sound and Oregon;
Sojourning east a while longer, soon I travel toward you, to remain, to teach robust American love,
For I know very well that I and robust love belong among you, inland, and along the Western sea;
For these States tend inland and toward the Western sea, and I will also.

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Vocabulary

depict

verb

definition: to show, describe, or portray in a painting, sculpture, or written work.
The author depicts life a hundred years in the future.
Spanish: representar, pintar, describir
forms: depicted, depicting, depicts

identity

noun

definition: Your identity is all of those things that make you exactly who you are.
When he is on stage, an actor leaves behind his own identity.
Spanish: identidad
forms: identities

sentiment

noun

definition: a way of thinking or feeling about something.
The sentiment against him was very strong.
Spanish: sentimiento, opinión

spirit

noun

definition: the meaning or intent of a thing.
The judge tried to stay true to the spirit of the law.
Spanish: espíritu

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 Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Before you start reading...

Here are the vocabulary words that will be in this reading. Let's see how well you already know them.

Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
depict				
identity				
sentiment				
spirit				

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2. Word Builder

Words are made of smaller parts that are called syllables. Some words have one syllable, but many have two or more. Draw lines to show how the syllables build each vocabulary word.

ty pict it ti de spir den i sen ti ment

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

4. _____

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3. After reading and exploring the words through some activities...

Do you know these words better? Check the box that shows how well you know each word. It's ok if you don't know them yet (this is not graded)!

	Don't know it	Have heard of it but not sure of its meaning	Know something about its meaning	Know it well
depict				
identity				
sentiment				
spirit				

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Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. According to this passage, Europeans in the 1800s thought Americans were

A. funny and silly.

B. smart and educated.

C. friendly and happy.

D. crude and uneducated.

2. A problem in this passage is that Americans did not have a strong national identity. What solution to this problem is described in the passage?

A. An Englishman wrote criticism about American art and literature.

B. Europeans would be sent on trips to the West to see the beauty.

C. Emerson asked artists to write about the American experience.

D. Painters would go to California to paint the landscapes there.

3. Which of these answers best explains why Walt Whitman would have thought the spirit of America was closely tied to nature?

A. America's land was more wild and free than other countries.

B. He had been to Europe and disliked the nature there.

C. He thought that writers only get great ideas from wild animals.

D. He thought that writers do their best work while outdoors.

4. Based on the text, what can be inferred about many Europeans during the 1800s?

A. They believed that America was a well-educated and respectable nation.

B. They believed that countries with well-known writers and artists had more educated people.

C. They believed that European countries could not produce quality books and plays.

D. They disliked America because it had a large amount of natural resources and land.

5. The passage "The West" is mostly about

A. all the ways that English people mocked America.

B. how poets helped create an American style of literature.

C. the differences between European and American paintings.

D. the life of the first American poet, Walt Whitman.

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6. Read the following sentences: "The Englishman was mocking America. He echoed a popular European sentiment that Americans were crude, uneducated people."

The word **echoed** means

A. questioned

B. said something similar

C. argued against

D. wrote down on paper

7. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wanted a national style of literature, _____ he wrote a speech to other writers.

A. but

B. so

C. while

D. because

8. What are the places that Walt Whitman names in his poem "A Promise to California"?

9. How do the two poems by Whitman show the American ideals that were discussed in the passage?

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